

# ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ROOTS OF MEDIEVAL ART, SYMBOLISM AND ARCHITECTURE

by  
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The first question we must pose is what an Egyptian temple really is. We find an answer in the temple of Edfu. „Seeing it is like looking at the horizon of the sky; everyone who enters, enters the sky.“ Therefore the temple is the horizon, the entrance to the sky.

The entrance gateway, then, with its two towers, symbolizes two hills. The portal in the middle represents the rising sun. The temple is a place of passage. Two spheres come together, this side and the other side of existence, visible and invisible reality.

Only priests were permitted to enter a temple, not the common people. Therefore the priests bore the barque outside into the open yard so the people could pray and petition to gods.

The temple was oriented east-west, the way of the sun, and north-south, the path of the Nile. Further important architectural elements in the interior design are a rising floor and a matching descending ceiling.

Each temple marks the beginning of a sacred way, a procession-way. Outside the temple are smaller chapels like altars in Corpus Christi processions.

How does such a temple district look? There is a great wall surrounding it. In the middle stands the stone temple. In the area in between we find the organizational life of the site, stores, administrative offices, production stalls, scribal schools, library and homes of the priests. Till today we can find the same construction in the Catholic Monasteries.

The Sacred Shrine in the center has a pedestal made of stone on which sits the Sacred Barque. The Sacred Shrine is of small dimensions, rendering it able to be carried out of the temple. At a ceremony they went to the different barque stations. Above the cult-figure, the Holy-Barque, there was a canopy built of four tent poles on which lay a carpet. We can find the same representation in the space above the monstrance in processions for Corpus Christi.

Now let us examine temple construction in ancient Egypt. Buildings have the form of later basilicas, a high nave and two aisles.

Under the roof of an Egyptian Temple you must perforce be in the presence of a god. The temple symbolizes the horizon, a passage into the holy space and the cult effigy represents the god himself.

An obelisk expresses the shape of a sun ray, and therefore it is a sun sanctuary. It can be ascended on the inside. At the top of the obelisk we find a pyramid, the symbol of the Primeval Mound. The obelisk symbolizes repeated acts of creation, victory of the light over darkness.

In Memphis we find semblance buildings for the first time. Doors are only outlined. This is the way from the earthly to the transcendental world. It's a time of transition between two worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Ra is the God of Light and the Creator of All Things. He is the absolute ruler of the cosmic order and completely ineffable and unknowable. Hence the sun takes the place of the invisible God. The Egyptian people imagined that the sun travelled in his sun-barque across the sky. The wings of the falcon god Horus represented the sky. The color gold was the color of the Sun-God Ra and the sky the domain of the sun. The sun also represented the universal all-seeing eye.

Next we will examine the infusions of Egyptian religion. In incense, Egyptians saw the divine breath. In the inhalation of incense they understood a revival of individual life and a redress for the injuries caused by all enemies. Bad things would be destroyed.

The course of the sun begins in the east, and that is the birth or rebirth of light. The sun grants light and heat for people during the day while sundown in the west means death of the sun. During the night the sun shines in the realm of the dead on the other side of the world. In the morning, the sun leaves the underworld and returns to the east. This belief is nothing else but the principle of death and becoming, the story of birth, life, death and rebirth.

Spirals are sun symbols, too, or rather emblems of the sun's annual travels, for they symbolize the course of the sun from the shortest to the longest day and back again. We can recognize this symbol on Celtic, and other artifacts in Ireland up to the present day.

### **Dissemination of Egyptian Knowledge**

From 310 BC to 30 AD we have the foreign rule of the Greeks in Egypt with the Ptolemy pharaohs. In their capital at Alexandria we find the most important library of antiquity. Also there is a smaller, but also important library of the Serapeion. Pythagoras spent 22 years in an Egyptian temple, where the priests instructed him in many disciplines and fields of knowledge. With this knowledge he returned to Greece. But he was not the only Greek who went to Egypt. There also travelled Sophocles, Solon, Plato, Heraclitus, Herodotus and others. In later times, the Romans also studied at the Library of Alexandria and its associated academy, which constituted a great center of knowledge and science.

The patriarch Moses was an Egyptian priest who was educated in the secret traditions of mathematics. In esoteric fashion he passed on the instructions for building the tabernacle in Jerusalem. The knowledge came from Egypt to Jerusalem.

With the crusades this knowledge reached Europe through Constantinople. With Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles we have two cross-shaped religious buildings with five domes, one dome over each arm of the cross and the largest one over the crossing of the arms.

This is the architectural form we find in St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, built 1063-1094 after the pattern of a building with five domes and a Greek cross. The cross stands for a sun symbol in ancient Egyptian conception. It symbolizes birth, life, death, the way through the underworld and rebirth. Jesus now represents the light. The east-west axis represents the course of the sun. The direction north-south represents the flow of the Nile-River. We can find the symbolism of the sun's path also on Irish gravestones.

Let us have a look at the interior of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. On the upper parts of the walls we find mosaics in gold. For this reason the cathedral is called the Golden Cathedral. In ancient Egypt the color gold symbolizes the sky – the empire of the sun.

The Campanile of St. Mark's, the bell tower, imitates an obelisk, one that is walkable or passable inside. It is situated south of the cathedral where the sun reaches its strongest force. The apex of the obelisk is a pyramid. The bells in the campanile demonstrate the symbolic connection between sky and earth.

Next we come to Romanesque architecture, where we will have a look at the Cathedral of Speyer. Its main-axis goes east-west and its cross-axis in north-south. The Romans got their knowledge of architecture from ancient Egypt, in the time of Roman conquest and occupation of Egypt. For a great length of time the supreme god was Horus, worshiped in the form of a falcon. The head was in the east, the tail in the west and the two wings in the north and south. This concept was the basis for the ground-plan in Romanesque and Gothic ecclesiastical architecture.

In the east we find in both styles a round end which represents the head of a falcon, the sunrise, as in ancient Egypt. On the east side of an Egyptian temple we find steps to the inner sanctum. On the exterior the roof is stepped. We also find windows only hinted at on the wall. All these architectural motifs we find at Speyer.

East and west we find two towers. On the east side the two towers mean, as in ancient Egypt, two mountains between which the sun rises. Jesus Christ symbolizes the sun and is therefore the light of the world. So shines the sun on the beautiful windows at sunrise during morning prayers. In the west the two towers represent the two mountains of ancient Egypt during the sunset. The large rose window, the sun, displays this concept during evening prayers. The sun dies and enters the realm of death, which corresponds in the church with the crypt. In the morning the sun rises again in the east. Where the two axis cross we find a tower above the roof. This tower symbolizes the brightest light of the sun during the day. The Romanesque and Gothic churches were built under secular and church authority.

The Gothic style starts in the year 1140 in Paris and surroundings. Defining elements of the Gothic are pointed arches, buttresses and vaults. Because of this it was possible to construct churches that stood much higher than before. A reduction of the thickness of the walls was achieved, a breakthrough for the lovely Gothic windows.

How was it possible to make such a progress? Charpentier claims the Templar Order moved to Jerusalem and lived in a part of the palace of King Baudoin II. that corresponded with the Temple of Salomon. The crusaders could have found the Ark of the Covenant and perhaps brought it to France. At any event, Gothic architecture begins at this moment. It was the result of a new architectural knowledge and something not to be compared with earlier styles.

Let us now have a look at Chartres Cathedral (1194-1220). Important for our purposes is the cubit. Louis Charpentier unit of measurement used to the degree of latitude on which the cathedral was built. The cubit used at Chartres measures 0,37 meters, and this corresponds to the hundred thousandth part of the length of latitude at Chartres between two degrees of longitude.

St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna: construction starts in the year 1137. The planning began some years earlier. The Templar Knights returned in 1128 from Jerusalem to France and naturally they reached Vienna before they arrived in Paris. St. Stepan's is oriented in an east-west direction. The sun rises in the east of the church – the place of rebirth – and sets in the west. Here we find the rose window between two mountains, represented by the two towers, the same ancient Egyptian mysticism. The cathedral lacks the transept, but this is represented by the South and North Towers.

The South Tower corresponds to an obelisk in ancient Egypt. It represents the greatest strength of the sun at high noon. The South Tower is an addition to the cathedral that can be entered from the inside. At the top of the tower we find a golden ball. The symbol of the sun, and the double eagle insignia of the emperor.

The North Tower has a special secret. In ancient Egypt, the north was conceived of as the point where energy for the whole process of birth, life, dying, death and rebirth was produced. Hence the North-Tower embodies such a point, a place where the connections between God and the people were most intense.

This we can still see today. During a Roman Catholic mass the clergy sits on the left side of the altar and the secular ruler on the right.

At St. Stephen's, steps lead to the altar and in the area of the South Tower the roof is stepped.

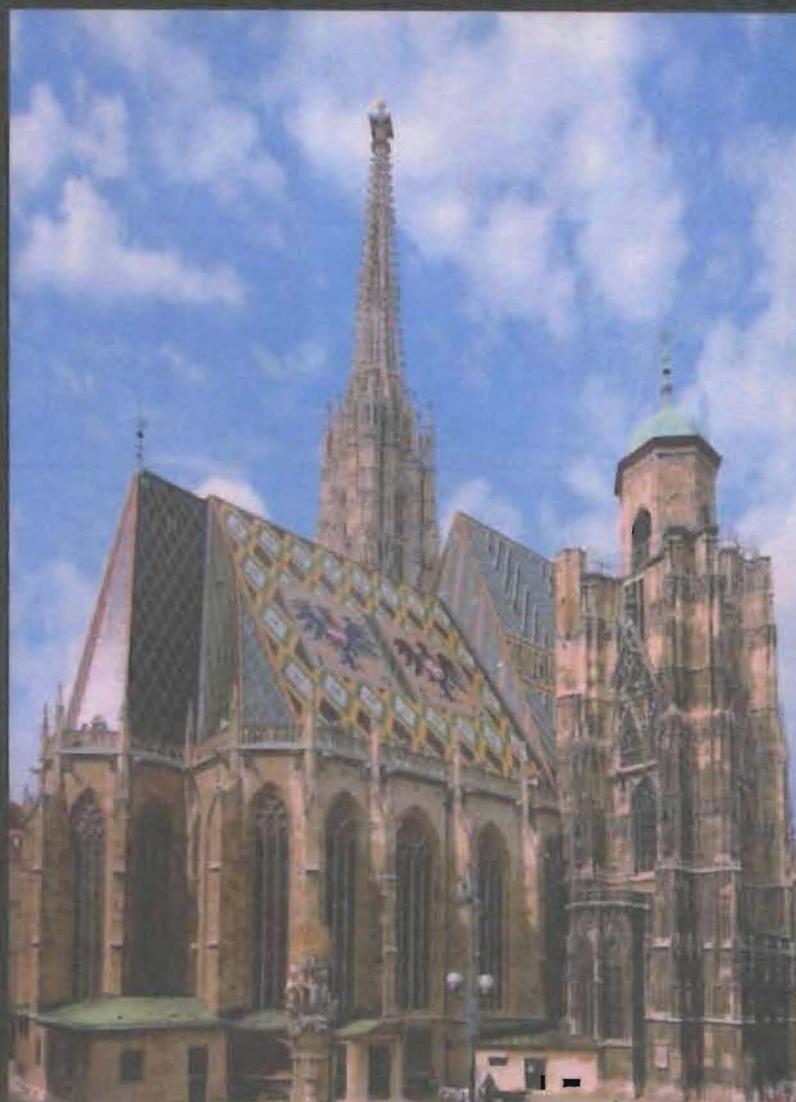
The enigma at St. Stephen's is the magic number of 37. This was a secret code. The aisle has 37 meters, the central aisle 74 meters and a height of 37 meters. The number 37, as we've seen, is also the unit of measurement at Chartres Cathedral. Vienna lies on the same latitude as Chartres, and the difference between their two locations is so minimal that a hundred thousandth of the length of latitude between two degrees of longitude is expressed by the whole number.

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**ALTÄGYPTISCHE WURZELN  
IN DER BAUKUNST UND  
SYMBOLIK DES MITTELALTERS**



**KÖNIG**